

# A Study of Emotional Intelligence among Malaysian Medical Students in a Public University in Egypt

Fatini Md Said\*, Narina A. Samah and Hadijah Jaffri

**Abstract---** *This research was conducted to explore the emotional intelligence among final year Malaysian medical students in one of the universities in Egypt. Emotional intelligence is often being associated with one's self-efficacy, emotionality, interpersonal skills, empathic skills. This research was conducted by using qualitative method. Narrative research design was used to gather data from the respondents. Four respondents were chosen by using purposive random sampling. The objective of this study was to explore students' EI related to self-efficacy and emotionality of final year Malaysian medical students as they were preparing themselves for professional exam before being placed in Malaysian public hospitals to complete their housemanship. A semi-structured interview questions were developed and validated before interview sessions were conducted. Content analysis was used to analyse the data obtained from this study. The results were then presented in an inductive content analysis approach. The findings of this study suggested that one's emotional intelligence would affect one's career-decision making and coping behaviour during emotional distress.*

**Keywords---** *Emotional Intelligence, Medicine, Medical Students, Final Year.*

---

## I. INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, one in every five houseman quit every year<sup>1</sup>. In general, medical students would have to spend a lot of money to complete 5 years of studies in medical school . These facts however, did not stop them from quitting. Datuk Dr S. Jeyaindran, the then Malaysian Deputy Health director-general made a statement in The Star newspaper, around 1000 out of 5000 housemen recruited every year did not complete their two-year in-house training<sup>1</sup>.

An alarming dropout rate is worrying and the number keeps on increasing over the past three years, he added. Some trainees claimed that they only discovered they are not suitable for the medical profession after they enrolled in the program, while others confessed that they were pressured into studying medicine by their parents <sup>1</sup>.

Physicians are known to be vulnerable towards intense situations when attending patients<sup>2</sup>. They have to adapt with their hectic schedule which could change abruptly due to emergency cases. This however will not change the fact that they will still have to treat the patients that they already had attended before the emergency occurred. Although there are many great advances in the field of medicine and these have tremendously changed people's understanding about health and diseases, this knowledge may have indirectly altered the content and the nature of medical school curricular in ways that it leaves the emotionally intimate and sustaining nature of the doctor-patient relationship<sup>3</sup>.

---

*Fatini Md Said\*, PhD student, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor, Malaysia. E-mail: fatinimdsaid@gmail.com  
Narina A. Samah, Associate Professor, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor, Malaysia.  
Hadijah Jaffri, Senior Lecturer, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor, Malaysia.*

Health care professionals who can communicate better demonstrate higher levels of professionalism because they are said to be emotionally intelligent. Theoretically emotional intelligence (EI) seems to be providing what medical curricular needs<sup>4</sup>. Past research are seemed to be lacking of deep understanding of medical students' beliefs, self-values, interpersonal skills and empathic skills in relation to EI. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore students' EI related to self-efficacy and emotionality of final year Malaysian medical students as they were preparing themselves for professional examinations before being placed in Malaysian public hospitals to complete their housemanship.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

Data from participants were collected through in-depth interviews which were conducted among four final year Malaysian medical students in one of public universities in Egypt. Researchers used narrative design as it has been used previously, in various settings of educational research. The data obtained from narrative study is closely linked to one's life history and biography. Narrative study involves telling stories while recounting on how individuals make sense of personal experience, events and actions in their lives<sup>5-7</sup>.

### ***Setting and Participants***

The study took place at one of the public universities in Egypt. The university was listed as one of the top five universities with most Malaysian graduates' houseman dropouts. The participants were chosen among final year Malaysian medical students. The population of this research involved the final year Malaysian medical students in one of the universities in Egypt. There were 213 final year students. Researchers used purposive sampling design to determine and select the information-rich cases for the most proper utilization of available resources<sup>8-9</sup>. Four respondents were chosen; 2 male and 2 female respondents

This study was conducted by using a semi-structured interview which allowed further investigation or elaboration of information that is significant for the research purposes<sup>10-11</sup>. Researchers interviewed the participants in four separate sessions that lasted 40 minutes to one hour respectively. In this study, the sub-questions were developed based on the two main research questions which answered the research objectives. The interviews were conducted between July and September of 2018 when the students were on their summer break, while completing their elective posting in public hospitals in Malaysia.

## **III. DATA ANALYSIS**

Content analysis was used to analyse all the transcripts. Categories were created to provide a means of describing the phenomenon, to increase understanding and to generate knowledge<sup>12-14</sup>. Through interpretation, categories were formulated according to its respective theme.

### ***Findings***

#### ***Theme 1: Student's Self-Efficacy***

In general, respondents made their decisions to study medicine nearly six years ago. When participants were asked the reason they chose to pursue medicine, respondent 1 (R1) and respondent 2 (R2) explained,

*It was my choice in the first place.... I got an excellent pointer during Matriculation .... However, the competition was extremely-high back then to pursue medical study in local IPTA. (R1)*

*Well, I scored 3.67 (CGPA) during matriculation.... but, I got offered Zoology course.... Then, I appealed to KPM (Ministry of Education Malaysia) regarding my intention to pursue medical study. (R2)*

However, the excerpts obtained from respondent 3 (R3) and respondent 4 (R4) below show the opposite responses;

*My parents decided for me that I should take medical course and since I had no clue at that time, I just follow the flow. (R3)*

*My mom recommended and forced me to take medical course and follow my brother's footsteps ..... (R4)*

Subsequently, the interviewer asked the participants to explain further about the struggles or challenges they possibly had before and after they were enrolled in the course. Below are the excerpts obtained;

*....It was a tough decision though because my family couldn't support the study fees there (In Egypt) ....but my parents did support me a lot! (R1)*

*When I got offered a random course (zoology), I accepted my fate, but he (my uncle) pushed me to go further. Plus, it was my mom's effort and will that help us finding ways for me to pursue medicine. (R2)*

*....I never thought of quitting studies. However, I feel regret for choosing this field*

*because of the lifestyle and the work environment ... I'll just do my best (R3)*

*I did feel regret that I took medicine as I am worried that I cannot become a good doctor.... (R4)*

## **Theme 2: Student's Emotionality**

Students are expected to be under much pressure, especially when it is around exam weeks. For students, to have to stay far away from the family members would be difficult and further contribute to the emotional pressure that they already have. Some might experience an emotional situation, which could lead to emotional distress 15. The respondents shared the emotional situation they often face in the following excerpts;

*I will experience sleeplessness....it is also known as insomnia.... (R1)*

*Every time before the exam I will become anxious. Seriously terrible. Last meal will be at 7 or 8 pm the day before. The morning before exams, I will throw up my 'empty stomach'..... (R2)*

Both respondents 1 and 2 exhibited clinical symptoms. In the excerpts below, both respondents further explained;

*The night before every paper, my heart will dance so fast, my heart palpitates.... I talk to myself, quite weird sometimes. (R1)*

*.... I had a stress-induced tremor....my hand will shake terribly.... and during the final exam I had last semester, I had stress-induced urticarial. (R2)*

### ***Spiritual Approach***

Respondents were then asked about how they overcome the stress. The following excerpts show their approaches;

*I use(d) perfume, drink warm milk, take a bath, zikrullah, even counting sheep...All was done but never successful. .... I just let it happened (R1)*

*.... I constantly call my siblings..., we motivate each other because we have the same aim which is to make our parents proud ... I also study as hard as I can and make 'doa'(prayers) when I'm feeling lost..(R3)*

*I will seek for friends and family's support... I will constantly call them.... I always reflect myself and turn into Allah S.W.T (R4)*

## **IV. DISCUSSION**

The findings of this research suggest how significant family members, especially the parents can be motivating and influencing regarding their children's decision making<sup>16</sup>. Some were able to decide on their own even though opportunity was not on their side at first. For instance, participants R1 and R2 were so determined and made the decision to pursue medicine on their own. Even though they were not accepted right away into the course, they tried to find ways to enrol themselves in a medical school. Both respondents who were still adolescents when the decision was made were fully confident about engaging in problem-solving, career exploration and goal selection. They are more likely to be experiencing a positive career future instead of career setbacks and barriers<sup>17</sup>. This findings show that someone with high self-efficacy would probably define their abilities better than those with low self-efficacy.

In the context of career exploration and decision-making, realistic self-concept is hypothesized to be one of the contributing factors to determine one's goals and actions<sup>18</sup>. Understandably, some parents preferred to take charge in making decisions for their children. Many parents feel that they are fully responsible in deciding for their children and it is not uncommon. Technically, it is not wrong for parents to decide for their children, but it may jeopardise their children's future. This is made evident when both R3 and R4 explained how they became regretful for choosing medicine as their career path.

Most students would face emotional distress during final exam<sup>19</sup>. Students who are emotionally intelligent will be aware of their emotional state <sup>20</sup>. Academic stressors include difficulties in adapting to new syllabus, extensive medical curricular, long lecturing hours, lack of leisure or recreational times and poor quality of the educational process at the college <sup>21</sup>. Irregular schedules, frequency of tests, competition with peers and worries related to academic performance or achievement and fear of failure are some of the additional stressors identified<sup>21-22</sup>.

Stress could also contribute to clinical symptoms which might lead to a more severe disease<sup>15,23</sup>. For instance, R2 reported that she had stress-induced tremor and urticarial. Urticarial is commonly known as hives or rash. Those who are experiencing urticarial will have red, swollen, itchy bumps on the skin which could be an allergy reaction towards food, insect sting, medicine or a body reaction towards stressful events <sup>24</sup>.

Psychological stressors could affect one's sleeping habit<sup>25</sup>. R1 stated how he could not sleep well every exam night and became insomniac. He could not get enough sleep the night before exams which is not unusual for medical students to not consider sleeping as a top priority as they have to meet their academic requirements <sup>15,26</sup>

There are many ways that one can do to overcome stress and anxiety. One of the most common methods would be by using a spiritual approach. Spirituality could be defined as knowing about oneself and the understanding of the existence of the highest power through which the world is governed<sup>27</sup>. Spirituality does not necessarily related to god and religion. It acts as a faith which linked a normal human being to their soul while believing the existence of a higher power<sup>28</sup>.

The results obtained from this study are consistent with past research. Respondents pray, chant zikrullah, and self-reflect themselves when they are feeling lost and intense<sup>29-30</sup>. In one of the past studies, it was found that spiritual approach can alleviate the stress experienced by students while increasing their motivation to learn <sup>31</sup>. People who use spiritual approach can face stress easier and deal with critical events better <sup>29-31</sup>.

## V. CONCLUSION

The results and discussion conclude that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in medical students' daily lives. They are not using them to sustain their cognitive abilities for academic achievement purposes but also to maintain and sustain their well-being as well as the others. Unpredictable events and conflicts might arise at different times and the way the individuals handling them would depend on their emotional intelligence. One's ability to perceive, manage, understand and utilize emotion would affect other aspects of his/her lives. For instance, the ability to perceive oneself would lead to an accurate self-evaluation and the derivation of self-concept, which will allow someone to judge him/herself accurately before making decisions, especially career-related decisions.

Other than that, emotional intelligence will also help medical students manage their emotions well and facilitate them through emotional situations or psychological distress. Medical students who can control their emotions well and emotionally intelligent will be able to maintain and sustain their relationship with people surrounding. Besides, medical students would still have to complete their daily activities which are non-academic related and to keep up with life changes they definitely need to have stable and high emotional intelligence to survive. Self-compose and coping strategies while in distress would help improve their patient-doctor relationship once they started working.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Jeyaindran DDS. Housemen do not complete training stint for various reason. In The Star Online (Ed.). Petaling Jaya, 2015. Retrieve from : <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation>
- [2] Arora S, Ashrafian H, Davis R, Athanasiou, T, Darzi, A, Sevdalis, N. Emotional intelligence in medicine: *a systematic review through the context of the ACGME competencies*, 2010, 44, 49-764.
- [3] Foreback J, Kusz H, Lepisto BL, Pawlaczyk, B. Empathy in Internal Medicine Residents at Communitybased Hospitals: A Cross-sectional Study. *Journal of Medical Education and Curricular Development*, 2018, 5, 1-4.
- [4] Cherry G, Fletcher I, O'Sullivan H, Dornan T. Emotional intelligence in medical education: a critical review. *Journal of Medical Education*, 2014, 48, 468-478. doi: doi: 10.1111/medu.12406.
- [5] Cresswell J, W. Educational research : *Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research (4th Edition ed.)* Edinburgh: Pearson 2014.
- [6] Kim JH, Latta MM. Narrative Inquiry: Seeking relations as Modes of Interaction. *Journal of Educational Research*, 2009, 103(2), 69-71.
- [7] Elliott J. Using narrative in social research: qualitative and quantitative approaches. London: Sage 2005.
- [8] Chua Y. Mastering Research Methods. Malaysia: Mc Graw- Hill Education (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd 2016.
- [9] Etikan I, Musa SA, Alkassim RS. Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 2015, 5(1), 1-4. doi:0.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.1

- [10] Stuckey HL. Three types of interviews: Qualitative research methods in social health. *Journal of Social Health and Diabetes*, 2013, 1(2), 56-59.
- [11] Blandford A. Semi-structured qualitative studies. In M. Soegaard & R. Dam (Eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Human-Computer Interaction (2nd Edition ed.)*. *The Interaction Design Foundation*. Aarhus, Denmark: 2013.
- [12] Elo S, Kyngas H. The qualitative content analysis process., 2008, 62(1), 107-115.
- [13] Cavanagh S. Content analysis: concepts, methods and applications. *Nurse Researcher*, 1997, 4, 5-16.
- [14] Rashidi, Begum, RA, Mokhtar M, Pereira JJ. Implementation of Content Analysis as Research Methodology for Identifying Criteria for Sustainable Construction. *Journal of Advanced Research Design*, 2014, 1(1), 18-27.
- [15] Sidik SM, Rampal L, Kaneson N. Prevalence Emotional Disorders Among Medical Students in A Malaysian University. *Asia Pacific Family Medicine*, 2013, 2(213-217).
- [16] Blustein DL. A relational theory of working. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 2011, 79(1), 1-17.
- [17] Emmerling RJ, Cherniss C. Emotional Intelligence And Career Choice Process. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 2003, 11, 153-167.
- [18] Lent RW, Morris TR, Penn LT, Ireland GW. Social-cognitive predictors of career exploration and decision-making: Longitudinal test of the career self-management model. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 2019, 66(2), 184-194.
- [19] Sherina MS, Lekhraj R, Nadarajan K. Prevalence of emotional disorder among medical students in a Malaysian university, *Asia Pacific Family Medicine*, 2003, 2, 213-217.
- [20] Mayer JD, Caruso R, Salovey P. Emotional Intelligence Meets Traditional Standards for an Intelligence (Vol. 27) 1999.
- [21] Fawzy M, Hamed SA. Prevalence of Psychological Stress, Depression and anxiety among medical students in Egypt. *Psychiatry Research*, 2017, 255, 186-194.
- [22] Firth-Cozens, J. Dependency and self-criticism as predictors of depression in young doctors. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 2001, 2(3), 414-418.
- [23] Dahlin M, Joneberg N, Runeson B. Stress and depression among medical students: a cross-sectional study. *Journal of Medical Education*, 2005, 39(6), 594-604.
- [24] Bernstein J, Lang D, Khan D, Craig T, Dreyfus D, Hsieh F, Wallace D. The diagnosis and management of acute and chronic urticaria. *Journal Allergy Clinical Immunology*, 2014, 133(5), 1270.
- [25] Anjum A, Bajwa M, Saeed R. Sleep Patterns ; Among medical and non medical students of University of Lahore. *The Professional Medical Journal*, 2014, 21(1), 148-156.
- [26] Syed, Sohail, Imam, Harun, Noor Karim, Abdul, Jusoh, Nor, Mamad, Nor. Malay Version Of Spiritual Well-Being Scale: Is Malay Spiritual Well-being Scale a Psychometrically Sound Instrument?, 2014, 4.
- [27] Othman K, Sipon S. Researching Solution Based on Islamic Views and Practice in Managing Financial and Work Place Stress. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 2012, 2(8), 239-252.
- [28] King D. Rethinking claims of spiritual intelligence: A definition, model, and measure. (*Doctoral*), Trent University, Ontario 2008.
- [29] Shaikh BT, Kahloon A, Kazmi M, Khalid H, Nawaz K, Khan N, Khan S. Students, Stress, and Coping Strategies: A case of Pakistani Medical School. *Education For Health*, 2004, 17, 346-353.
- [30] Emmons R. Is spirituality intelligence? Motivation, cognition, and the psychology of ultimate concern. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 2000, 10(1), 3-26.
- [31] Salasiah, Hamjah. Mohamad Rasit, Rosmawati, Md Sham, Fariza. Role of Spiritual Aspect in the Learning Process of Islamic Studies Student. *The Social Sciences*, 2012, 7. 625-629. 10.3923/sscience.2012.625.629.